

West Yard Cemetery

Although it is located in an out of the way spot, for those interested in early New Hampshire history, Marlow's West Yard cemetery is worth the drive. Surrounded by wooded land, enclosed by a stone wall, this cemetery is on a steeply pitched hill on the corner of Gustin Pond and Jay Allen Roads. Many of the stones are now also pitched by the frost, and a few are broken, but most are upright and still quite legible. One can see the graves of many of Marlow's early families here, with the earliest stone dated 1779.

Most intriguing are the stones that do not conform to the typical style of cemetery folk art of the time, which featured somber death's heads and weeping willows. According to Glenn Knoblock, New Hampshire Humanities presenter who visited the cemetery in 2008, the West Yard Cemetery is unusual for the prevalence of uplifting, joyful images chiseled onto quite a few of its stones. For example, there are quite a few stones that were created with variations on the design pictured in this photograph, Elisha Huntley's stone. It is an exuberant design, featuring dynamic rays issuing forth from a heart placed atop an urn. This view of death was different from the norm of that time period, which involved fear and condemnation symbolized by a death's head or a weeping willow. Elisha's stone, and others in the West Yard Cemetery, illustrate confidence in a heavenly welcome, rather than fear of condemnation. Even his inscription bears witness to his faith, telling mourners to "dry up your Tears," for "I must be here 'til Christ appears."

We speculate that these early Marlow settlers favored positive and uplifting images because they descended from families who left Lyme Connecticut as Free Will Baptist dissenters from the established Congregationalist Church.

Marlow's West Yard Cemetery tells us a story of a people who seem to have faced death squarely, unafraid, and who left a

permanent record of a “hidden gem” to see and admire in the hills of Cheshire County.

Article and gravestone photograph by Joanne Thomas - Marlow Historical Society

